

State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board **Fall 2015**



2015 2016

Superintendent Denise Juneau

The Student Advisory Board is part of Graduation Matters Montana, an initiative to increase the number of Montana students who graduate from high school through collaborative partnerships with schools, community organizations, businesses and youth.



Overview

Montana Superintendent Denise Juneau hosted the fall Student Advisory Board (SAB) Summit Oct. 8-9 at Fairmont Hot Springs Resort. The theme for the first SAB meeting of the 2015-2016 school year was, "Student Voice & Student Choice." Thirty-two students from 29 high schools around Montana represented their school's student population. The primary focus was to discuss their educational experience with Superintendent Juneau. Some of these students traveled almost 1,000 miles to talk about important issues affecting school climate, dropout prevention, and Graduation Matters Montana efforts. SAB members are chosen through an application process and school nominations. The 2015-2016 Student Advisory Board was selected last spring and will be the final members chosen for the Graduation Matters Montana initiative under Superintendent Juneau's administration.



Interactive Activities & Events

Through ice breakers, games, and group discussions, SAB members learned more about each other, and found common ground on the challenges their schools face. Before SAB members arrived at Fairmont, they were asked to conduct a peer survey based on the level of student voice and advocacy occurring at their schools. Not only were SAB members given tools to help make their schools a better place, they created and shared their own wonderful ideas of improvement.

Power Up! Speak Out!

One vital part of school climate is peer-to-peer relationships. Graduation Matters Montana partnered with Power Up, Speak Out! to provide lessons and

training for our SAB members concerning healthy relationships and student empowerment. Based out of Red Lodge, this group has experience in training hundreds of Montana students on how to be kind and encouraging leaders within their schools. Lead educator and program developer Travis Burdick provided five interactive lessons which demonstrated the importance of peer support and leadership. SAB members were encouraged to take these ideas back to their own schools and use them accordingly.



The Youth Risk Behavior Survey

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is conducted every-other year by the Montana Office of Public Instruction and the Centers for Disease Control. It's a voluntary questionnaire that examines a random cohort of less than 5,000 students from around the state. YRBS measures health risks and choices Montana students report in an effort to target trends and gauge outcomes. Conducted in February of 2015, the latest YRBS survey determined that methamphetamine and alcohol use is declining among those questioned, however thoughts of depression and suicide are on the rise.



Student Response: A large majority of the SAB members agreed that topics like depression and suicide are part of their school environment and hoped that schools will do more to address these issues. Conversations among small student-lead groups focused primarily on the need for schools to examine not only the physical health of students, but also their mental wellbeing. Students offered suggestions on training faculty and staff members on crisis and trauma responses to better serve the “whole student” rather than just academics. SAB members reported that they are tired of seeing their peers dropout of high school due to mental and emotional issues that could be prevented.

Student Choice

Student Advisory members were asked a series of “Agree or Disagree” statements in which they self-identified or observed peers being involved with drugs, alcohol, and other risky behaviors. After each question was asked, students declared if they agreed and why they felt that way. The “Agree or Disagree” statements included:

- Texting while driving is the most dangerous thing you can do in a vehicle.
- I believe many of my peers at school are having sex.
- I think more students smoke marijuana than cigarettes.
- My community cares about whether or not I make healthy choices.
- I have participated in binge drinking or have seen someone do it in the past month.
- I or someone I know, has seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.
- I feel like I have one adult at school who cares about me.



Student Response: Students reported that texting while driving is common and probably the most dangerous distraction while driving. Unanimously, they reported that most high school students are sexually active. Almost all of the students reported that they consider drugs, specifically marijuana, is a problem at their schools and would like to see something done about it. Students also agreed that they have experienced (either personally or through a friend) the rising trend in depression and suicidal thoughts. Students had a healthy group discussion on these tough topics and also unanimously agreed that they have caring adults and faculty at each of their respective schools.

Student Voice

After SAB members participated in “Agree or Disagree,” they were taken through a lesson titled, “How to Manage Stress.” This activity provided students with ideas for coping with everyday pressures as well as ways to help their peers manage them. SAB members were also given time to discuss in small groups the changes they wish to see implemented within their districts as a means of addressing risky behaviors and lowering the dropout rate.

Solutions included:

- Drug testing for those students who are in activities
- More information provided to students regarding the dangers of drug usage
- School staff as well as students need to be educated on the dangers of depression
- Schools and the community should promote and support positive and healthy activities
- Creating positive Facebook and other social media pages that offer support to students
- Including and inviting community members to school events so that everyone is invested

Conclusion

The Office of Public Instruction's Graduation Matters Montana would like to thank all of the chaperones and students who committed to this gathering. The ideas and topics shared will be helpful to current and future Montana students. The input of student opinion and voice is something Superintendent Juneau considers invaluable, and cannot wait to hear what this 2015-2016 Student Advisory Board has in store for her this spring.



State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board Members Fall 2015

Andrew Donlan, Ashley Hofland, Bailey Menahan, Blazz Wood, Bristan Fenner, Cassidy Clotfelter, Charlene Allmer, Crystal Lamere, Dylan Haggart, Elijah Kleinsasser, Evangeline Campbell, Gabriella Blatt, Hannah Fradkin, Ian Furstenberg, Ian Kozak, Issac Cowley, Jake Michels, Johnathan Mason, Joseph Martinez, Katelyn Weldon, Lauryn Barnhart, Mackenzie Spence, Naumie DuShane, Paige Holmes, Paige Robertson, Piper Robinson, Sean Swinford, Stephanie Woodland, Sydney Racine, Taylor Johnson, Trevor Canty, and Tyler Subatch.



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